

# Washington State Freeway HOV System Policy

## Executive Summary

November 1992

Reprinted June 1997



Washington State  
Department of Transportation

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Department of Transportation**  
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## A Message from Secretary Sid Morrison

Providing the people of Washington with safe and efficient mobility options is a major challenge and goal of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

Customers are the focus of everything we do, and our overall vision is to *Move it better!*



It has long been our priority to provide transportation programs and facilities that

enhance our economic vitality and address the growing demands for moving people and goods around and through the state. Voter approval of Sound Move, the ten year Regional Transit System Plan for the Puget Sound region, and the level of planning underway for similar transportation systems in other urban regions of the state emphasize the growing

importance and value being placed on these issues.

WSDOT has an established policy regarding the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) system. The goal – provide an infrastructure that supports alternatives to single occupancy vehicle use and encourage people to use higher occupancy modes of travel. Through transportation industry partnerships we can jointly develop a state-wide transportation system that meets our needs and is second to none.

At WSDOT we are committed to improving mobility and increasing freeway efficiency. HOV will continue to play a key role in congestion management strategies which allow our transportation systems to move more people and meet current and future mobility needs.

A large, stylized handwritten signature of Sid Morrison in green ink. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Sid' being particularly prominent.

Sid Morrison  
Secretary of Transportation

## What is the relationship between Commission HOV policy and policy presented in this booklet?

**Answer:** They are directly related and complement each other.

On May 15, 1996, the Washington State Transportation Commission adopted *Statewide Freeway HOV Policy*. It is included as part of *Washington's Transportation Plan 1997-2016*, the 20-year vision for all modes of transportation in Washington State.

The principal features of Commission Statewide HOV Policy are:

- clarification of the state's responsibility to finance construction of freeway HOV lanes, as well as to manage their design, construction and operation.

- provides regional flexibility through a collaborative process between the department and Metropolitan Planning Organizations.
- provides the public an opportunity to influence proposed significant changes in HOV lane policy or operation.
- protects HOV system 'integrity' by requiring that regional HOV operating policies include a HOV speed and reliability standard, and a mechanism to enforce that standard.

The connection with this booklet:

Commission HOV policy designates this *Washington State Freeway HOV System Policy* as the resource for HOV policy direction. Policies contained herein are comprehensive and intended for immediate use on freeway HOV systems. In regions of the state where HOV systems exist or are being planned, the Commission invites regional review of these policies through a process which is described in the Commission document\*.

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\* For a copy of the Washington State Transportation Commission, *Statewide Freeway High Occupancy Vehicle Policy*, please write or call:

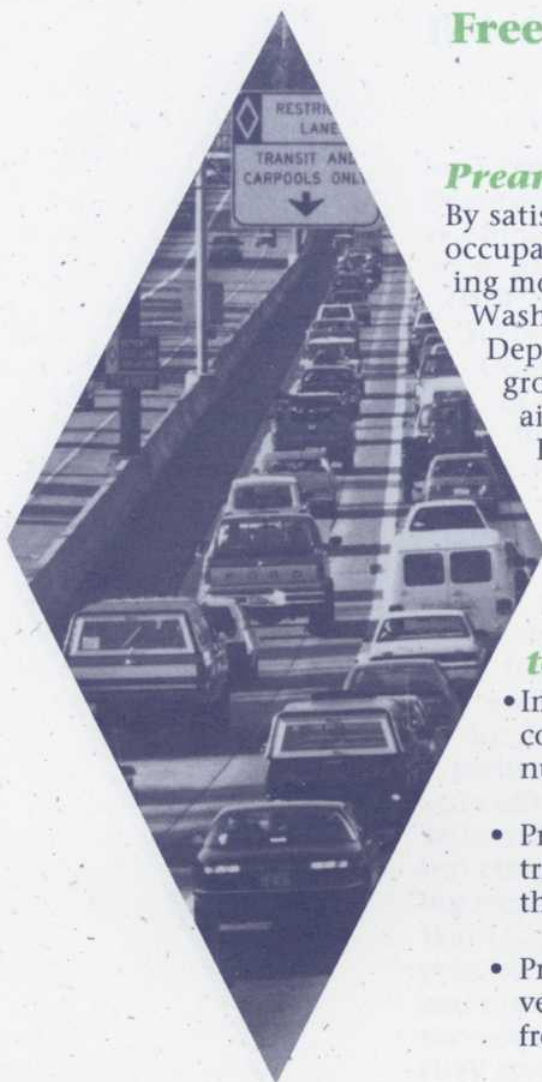
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## Freeway HOV System Objectives



### *Preamble*

By satisfying the following overall objectives, the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) system is successfully providing mobility choices consistent with the mission of the Washington State Transportation Commission, Department of Transportation and the goals of state growth management, commute trip reduction and air quality programs. Critical to the success of the HOV system is public support. These objectives and all decisions regarding the system must reinforce public acceptability of and support for HOV facility development.

### *The objectives of the HOV systems are to accomplish the following:*

- Improve the capability of congested freeway corridors to move more people by increasing the number of persons per vehicle.
- Provide travel time savings and a more reliable trip time to high occupancy vehicles that use the facilities.
- Provide safe travel options for high occupancy vehicles without unduly affecting the safety of the freeway general-purpose mainlines.

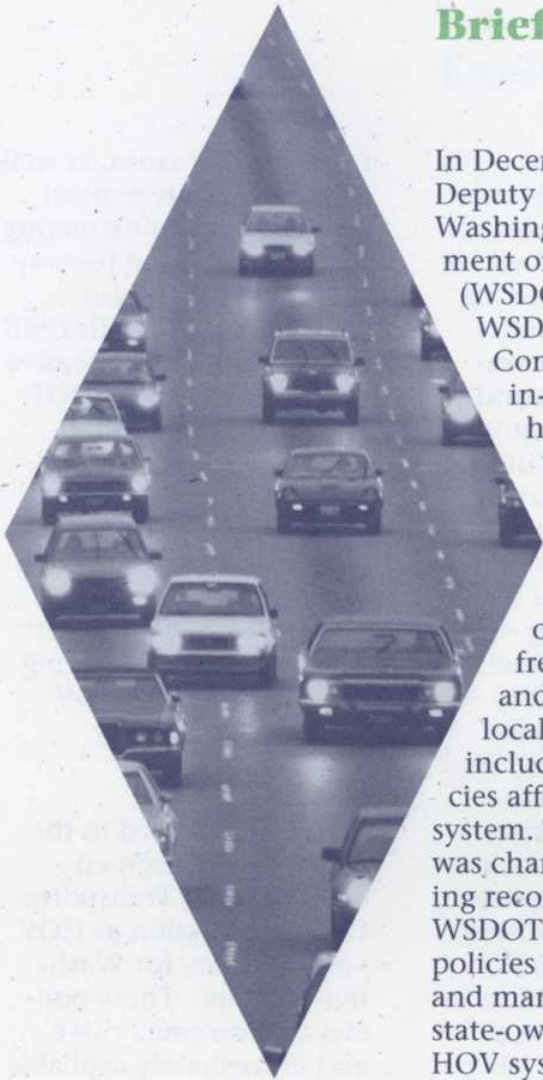
Measures of effectiveness used to determine the impact of the HOV system include the following:

- person throughput,
- vehicle occupancy,
- comparative and absolute general-purpose and HOV lane travel times,
- travel time reliability, and
- accident rates.





## Brief Policy Development History



In December 1989, the Deputy Secretary of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) appointed the WSDOT HOV Study Committee to take an in-depth look at the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) program. The task included review of planning, construction and operations of the freeway HOV system and its relationship to local jurisdictions, including transit agencies affected by the system. The committee was charged with developing recommendations for WSDOT positions and policies for administration and management of the state-owned portion of the HOV system.

Initially, 12 issues were identified for review. Detailed committee discussions identified additional issues which were combined into like categories with the original 12 issues and assigned to team members for subcommittee action. After thorough investigation, discussion and review of existing procedures, policies, and "policies in practice," the

HOV Study Committee drafted the HOV Policy Issues report, a compilation of 14 HOV issue areas matched with policy recommendations.

This draft policy statement document was submitted to local and regional jurisdictions throughout the state for technical review, critique and comments.

By early 1991, WSDOT had received guidance and comments from 23 agencies statewide. These comments were then reviewed by the WSDOT HOV Study Committee and incorporated into a final draft report.

In April 1991, the final draft report was re-circulated to local and regional jurisdictions with an invitation to attend an all-day workshop. The workshop discussion focused on HOV system policy issues and the process through which WSDOT would proceed with adoption of freeway HOV policy.

From workshop discussion, and additional written comments received from jurisdictions, the



HOV policy report was again edited, resulting in completion of the *Washington State Freeway HOV System Policy – Final Report*. WSDOT executives reviewed and commented on the document, and on August 20, 1991, the Deputy Secretary approved adoption of this document as department policy for the state-owned portion of the HOV system.

Freeway HOV policies have been amended several times since 1991. Shortly after issuing the first policy document WSDOT set-up a policy development, review and decision-making process. An executive committee was appointed to make final policy and administrative decisions. This HCT/HOV Policy Board created a multi-agency committee with membership representing regions of the state to help WSDOT management review and amend HOV policy.

In the mid-1990s the Washington State Transportation Commission became more involved in HOV system planning and policy development issues. Through the State High-

way System Plan, an element of Washington's Transportation Plan – the financially constrained 20-year multimodal plan for the state – the Commission committed to completing the Puget Sound Freeway Core HOV lanes. Also, in 1995, the Commission appointed an ad hoc committee to help develop a process which allowed for regional flexibility in developing congestion management strategies and mobility solutions; and included the Commission and the public in HOV system policy decision making. Representatives of business and government participated on this committee. The Commission HOV Stakeholder Committee completed their assignment in September 1995 and submitted HOV policy recommendations. At their May 15, 1996 meeting the Transportation Commission adopted *Statewide Freeway HOV Policy*, which has been included as an element of *Washington's Transportation Plan*.

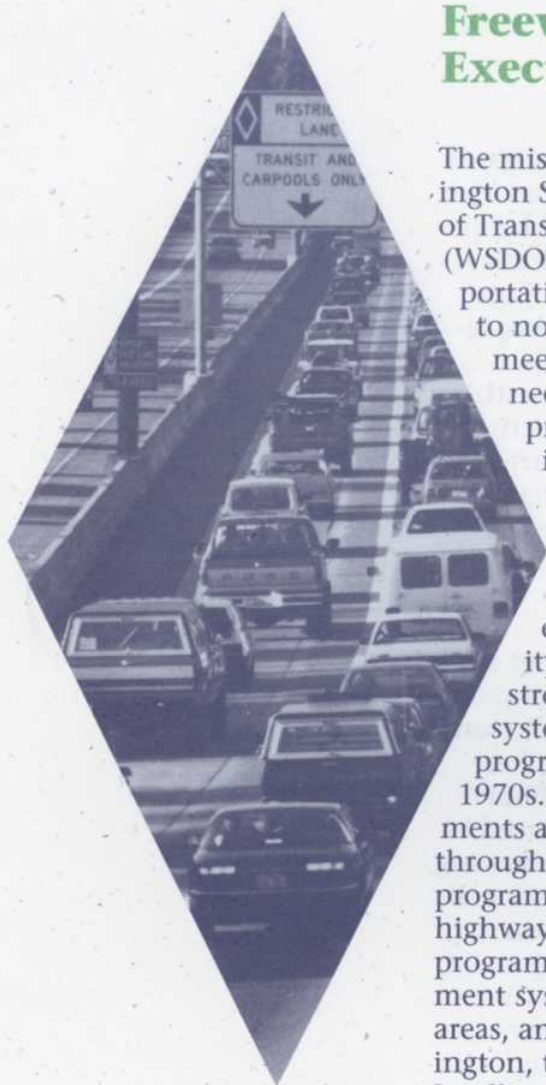
The Commission-level HOV policy clarifies the state's responsibility to finance construction of

freeway HOV lanes, as well as assuring state control for designing, constructing and operating the freeway HOV system. It also allows for regional flexibility through a collaborative process between WSDOT and Metropolitan Planning Organizations; and allows more opportunity for public and regional input in decision making. It protects HOV system *integrity* by requiring that a region's HOV operating policies include a HOV speed and reliability standard.

Policies contained in this booklet have been endorsed by the Transportation Commission as HOV system policy for Washington State. These policies are comprehensive and immediately available for use on freeway HOV systems. The HCT/HOV Policy Board will continue to provide administrative oversight of HOV policy development and will work with the Transportation Commission and/or MPOs in the state to amend HOV policy as such needs arise.



## Freeway HOV System Policy Executive Summary



The mission of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is to be a transportation team, second to none in the world, meeting the mobility needs of people and products of Washington State.

Mission objectives include reducing traffic congestion and enhancing mobility. WSDOT began a strong transportation system management program in the early 1970s. Today, its elements are implemented through the planning, program development and highway construction programs, traffic management systems in urban areas, and Venture Washington, the statewide Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) program.

The overall goals and objectives of the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) program are to maximize the people-carrying capacity of the freeway system by providing incentives to use buses, vanpools and carpools and to provide capacity for future growth in travel demand. Through HOV programs, WSDOT

strives to make the best use of existing facilities and maintain current and future highway mobility by increasing freeway efficiency and promoting programs to move more people in fewer vehicles. These programs also serve to mitigate transportation-related pollution and reduce dependency on fossil fuels.

Most existing elements of the HOV system have been designed and constructed under provisions of the Federal Surface Transportation Assistance Act. Future funding for completing the HOV lane system in the Puget Sound region and building HOV projects in other regions of the state is expected to come from federal, state, regional, and private sector sources.

In developing HOV policy, WSDOT managers recognize that no one option to the single occupant vehicle will succeed in enhancing mobility and solving traffic congestion problems. Implementing a variety of HOV system elements serves to complement the overall efficiency

of a high capacity transit system and the total transportation network in urban regions.

Also recognized is the importance of planning for support facilities such as park and ride lots and HOV direct access ramps, ITS applications such as Surveillance, Control and Driver Information systems and HOV ramp bypasses, and support services such as express bus service, ridematch services, parking strategies, incident management, and demand management programs. An effort to coordinate support services must be included in planning and designing HOV lanes and facilities.

The following policies are directed specifically toward freeway HOV facilities and services. Many of the same policy issues are also important for arterial HOV facilities. Because of limited operational experience and study of arterial HOV facility applications,

specific statements regarding those facilities have not been developed by WSDOT. Several local jurisdictions in the Puget Sound region have implemented arterial HOV facilities and are investigating the most effective ways for operating arterial HOV lanes. It is likely that arterial HOV policies or guidelines will be developed in the future.

This policy document is the result of a coordinated WSDOT/local jurisdiction effort to update the freeway HOV policy which was initially introduced in November 1991. Following are WSDOT policies for the freeway portion of the state HOV system.